Mission Unaccomplished

The place of education and learning in our national and regional performing arts and cultural organisations

---

A provocation paper by Sara Robinson and Teo Greenstreet for

Mission, Models, Money

Catalysing a more sustainable arts and cultural sector

October 2006

Provocation

As long as arts organisations keep their educational strands as a bolt on to the ‘core’ or ‘main house’ programme, they will never become fully relevant and engaging to the people they are there to serve.

Preface

"Education? That's what Sally and her team down the corridor does, and they do it really well"

"I don't know what the point is of our working with people in prison"

"I've never been to see our education work, I don't have time and my interest is in what happens on the main stage."

These are just three among many revealing comments made during our exploration of the role of education work in the UK's national and regional performing arts bodies. Our focus on national and regional arts institutions is significant for two reasons. Firstly, from Arts Council England's (ACE) pool of 1,135 Regularly Funded Organisations (RFOs) the 'top ten' performing arts organisations take the lion's share – almost 50% of the ACE's grants budget[1]. Secondly, it would be fair to assume that these top ten organisations should be setting strong examples of educational excellence and wide public engagement; yet anecdotal evidence suggests they need to do much more to value and develop this aspect of their work.

Seventeen people were interviewed during the course of our research, including Chief Executives, trustees and Educationalists from national, regional and smaller arts organisations, as well as policy-makers and researchers, and many of the points they raised have cross-sectoral resonance.

The resulting paper, which reflects our findings both from these interviews and other sources, is not a mapping paper. It aims to identify key questions about the role of education in our larger performing arts institutions, and provoke debate about the role that education *should* be playing if the arts are to fulfill their commitment to reaching out to the widest possible range of audiences and participants.

This paper would never have been written were it not for the advice and support of very many people. We are particularly indebted to Liz Hill (Arts Professional) and Clare Cooper (Mission, Models, Money) for their editing skills. Also Roanne Dods and Vernon Ellis (Mission, Models, Money); Tom Andrews, Jacqueline Riding and Matt Peacock (Clore Fellows 2004/05); Margaret Maden and Jane Drabble (PAEback Group); Robert Dufton (The Paul Hamlyn Foundation) and Adrian Ellis (AEA Consulting) for the time they gave up to share their views and help us keep our research focused.

[1] In the financial year 04/05, the ten highest Arts Council funded organisations received 47% of the total funding available for all Regularly Funded Organisations (£127m from £301m).

A tremendous vote of thanks must also go to the interviewees whose opinions and experiences have shaped the arguments we have presented here: we are very grateful to Sally Bacon, Executive Director, The Clore Duffield Foundation; Deborah Bull CBE, Creative Director, ROH2; Dick Downing, Principal Research Officer, National Foundation for Educational Research; Angela Galvin, CEO, Sheffield Theatres; Russell Gilderson, Chair, The Circus Space; Jenny Harris, Director of Education, National Theatre; Darryl Jaffray, former Director of Education, Royal Opera House; Mary Johnson, former Head of RSC Learning; Dani Parr, Associate Director, Northampton Theatres; Julia Rowntree, Learning Associate, London International Festival of Theatre; Nii Sackey, CEO, Biggafish; Maggie Semple OBE; Patrick Spottiswoode, Director, Globe Education at Shakespeare's Globe; John Stephens, Music Educator; Pauline Tambling, Executive Director, Development, Arts Council of England; Tim Wheeler, Artistic Director, mind the…gap; and Katherine Zeserson, Director of Learning and Participation, The Sage Gateshead;

Authors Sara Robinson and Teo Greenstreet

Sara Robinson is freelance arts consultant and projects director specialising in strategic initiatives which engender strong public engagement. She was a Clore Leadership Fellow 2004/05 prior to which she was Director of Ludlow Assembly Rooms, a rural arts centre in Shropshire.

Teo Greenstreet is Chief Executive of The Media Centre. He was also a Clore Fellow 2004/05, prior to which he spent 15 years developing creative and learning environments as Chief Executive of The Circus Space.

October 2006

Introduction

Why is it that as producers and presenters of art, we choose to make clear distinctions between those events and activities that sit under the 'education' banner and those that don't? This distinction raises some fundamental questions about art and its audiences. Do some of us need educating more than others? Are our core or 'main stage' programmes devoid of educational value? Is it beneficial to separate art from learning? And is this separation merely an issue of language and terminology, or is there a cultural hierarchy in play creating the distinction?

A marginal existence

Given that trustees and senior executives at some of our national performing art organisations express ambivalence and confusion[2] about how educational activity relates to the core purpose of the organisation, it's no surprise to find that education departments tend to sit at the margins of many of our major cultural institutions, financially under-resourced and semi-detached from the rest of the creative programme. Delve a little deeper into an organisation's education activities and you will often find comparatively poorly paid staff, a lack of internal debate and depth of understanding at senior executive and board levels, confusion around terminology and language, and a funding environment that reinforces education's marginalised relationship with the rest of the organisation – education departments seem to have evolved more by accident than design, driven by funders and charitable imperatives rather than mission.

A missed opportunity

Yet, if engagement with a wider range of people is the Holy Grail for arts organisations in the 21st century, aren't we missing a trick? Isn't education there to do precisely that? Arts education in its widest sense can be defined as *the process by which we engage with the art*[3]. Under this definition, education is fundamental to art and significant to us all, be we makers, audiences, participants, presenters, funders, employees or trustees. By

[2] Confusion regarding the strategic role of education work was expressed by a number of trustees at the Performing Arts Education (PAEback) discussions held in 2005/06. The PAEBACK group comprises trustees with education expertise from the Royal Shakespeare Company, Royal Opera House, Birmingham Royal Ballet, Ballet Rambert, Britten Sinfonia, London Symphony Orchestra, Sadlers Wells amongst others. Its purpose is to stimulate debate about how Boards might engage effectively in educational activities and strategy.

[3] A definition proposed by the majority of interviewees contributing to this paper.

separating it off from the rest of the creative programme and keeping it at the margins of the organisation, we run the risk of developing

- a core programme that misses infinite opportunities for engaging with people and embracing new forms of art
- an employee and volunteer force that does not share a common vision for the organisation
- an organisation which has a reduced capacity to adapt in the market place.

Alternative models do exist. When education is valued at the highest levels and set centre stage with the resources to match, arts organisations have flourished. The Sage Gateshead[4] and the London International Festival of Theatre[5], for example, have done just this, and are able to demonstrate engagement with a wide range of people without compromising the quality of their artistic programme. Indeed both organisations would argue that having an ethos of learning at the heart of what they do significantly enhances their ability to programme and operate creatively. Sheffield Theatres'[6] recent strategic review to explore the potential and scope of education has transformed the relationship education has with the rest of the organisation. Short case studies for each of these organisations can be found in the appendices.

A new lexicon

It is time to shrug off old (and tired) definitions of education by arts and cultural organisations, and explore fresh ones which clarify its purpose and potential. A new definition and a new language are long overdue: one which is much wider and more all-encompassing than the classic notion of education being a route to arts appreciation for children and young people.

Art and education are inextricably linked: one fuels the other because art without engagement is surely meaningless. By viewing education as *the* process of engaging people with the art we create, and by making it core to mission – alongside, equal and intrinsic to the art, organisations can develop:

- a much richer dialogue with audiences and participants which will inform both the creative process and the way the organisation operates;
- a vastly bigger programme of participatory activities, nurturing talent, self-expression and an appetite for the arts which should in turn, feed in to the rest of the creative programme;
- a culture of learning and creativity within the organisation, informing how we work as individuals and teams and how we remain flexible to ever-changing environments.

[4] See case study, appendix 2
[5] See case study, appendix 3
[6] See case study, appendix 1

To gain these benefits however, individual arts and cultural organisations and their principal funders must commit to a significant shift in thinking: audiences and participants should be valued for their curiosity, ideas and talents as much as for their wallets or their postcodes.

This paper proposes that the leaders of our national and regional arts and cultural organisations engage in a genuine debate about the definition and purpose of arts education, why it should (or shouldn't) be a part of their core programming activity and how it might be utilised much more strategically to deliver their organisational objectives to a wider public.

In the following pages we outline some of the key contextual themes, summarise traditional approaches, tease out some of the issues with regard to current outmoded definitions and explore how a new vision for education might fit in to current priorities and enable better delivery of the core mission of our national performing arts institutions.

Context

inconvenient truths

This country boasts a huge and growing range of arts education work of which we can be proud, much of it considered to be of an exceptionally high standard, and the UK is seen as a '*world leader in the development of education as a central function of arts organisations*'[7]. Yet despite such accolades, the status and role of arts education faces some troubling issues:

- decades of rhetorical strategic support for education have not resulted in strategic change; it often remains sidelined from core artistic activity and unrelated to core objectives
- definitions and terminology are confused, mechanisms for sharing best practice are very limited[8], and there are no standard or robust evaluation methodologies for making the case for arts education in common use either by arts and cultural organisations or their funders
- there is a lack of understanding of and advocacy for education amongst some trustees and senior executives in national performing arts organisations where notably, there exists a general sense that

[7] *Creative Tensions* (1998), a discussion document on arts organisations and education, Paul Owens, British American Arts Association.
[8] The Theatre Education Network, the national networking body for education in the performing arts, closed in 2006, just two years after its inception.

education has a lower status than the rest of the work – not least because it is often seen as having emerged as a result of funding imperatives rather than core mission[9]

- arts education positions, both freelance and salaried, are typified by long hours and low pay with only 10% of respondents to the Theatre Education Network's 2005 survey earning over £25,000 a year, despite 73% having a first degree and 30% a second degree[10]
- although official figures have not yet been researched, it is widely believed that the percentage of total arts spend – from both public and private sources – allocated to education, compared with the sums spent on our core and main-stage work, is miniscule. Indeed this appears to have been the case for decades. In the 1980s, Sir Roy Shaw, then Secretary General of the Arts Council of Great Britain, observed "*We can keep the Arts Council's educational expenditure in perspective by recalling that the British Film Institute with a 12th of our budget has an education department four times as large as ours. Moreover this year's total Arts Council's expenditure on education is less than the not uncommon overspending on a single set of a major opera*"[11]

the grail of public engagement

In contrast with this bleak picture, we are hearing more and more about the arts and cultural sector's desire to increase relevance and engagement with a much wider public. John Knell spells out the issue: *"…whilst levels of public attendance and participation in the arts are hardly new concerns, public engagement is the new black in the arts world – or the new old black. The slow train coming has undoubtedly become the runaway train."*[12] The need for arts and cultural organisations to reinvent and redefine themselves in order to gain wider public relevance in return for the current levels of public funding has also become a core political theme, and Culture Minister David Lammy has articulated deep government dissatisfaction with the pace of progress in this area: "*It is a great pity that the record sums of public investment we have made in the arts have not led to a higher profile for the arts in the public's mind".*[13]. Peter Hewitt, Chief Executive of Arts Council England, echoes his view: "*Ask to what extent [the audience] has been invited to enter into a dialogue with arts producers and presenters? Let's be honest, the answer is not enough… We've put considerable resources (with considerable success) into 'audience development' – but this has been more focused on persuading non-attenders to attend than meaningful dialogue between those who provide and those who go."*[14]

---

[9] Ibid 2
[10] www.theatre-ed.net
[11] Sir Roy Shaw, *Why the Arts and Education need each other*, speech in 1992
[12] John Knell,, 'Whose arts is it Anyway?'2006, commissioned by Arts Council, England
[13] David Lammy, Culture Minister, in a speech to the Association of British Orchestras Annual Conference, 30 January 2006 (cf. www.davidlammy.co.uk)
[14] Peter Hewitt (2005) *Changing Places*, Arts Council England

The irony is that neither policy-makers, cultural professionals nor cultural commentators seem to have fully grasped the notion that arts education could be the key to delivering the public engagement that they are seeking. This in itself speaks volumes about the way the sector values and defines educational activity, and the urgent need to gain clarity around its purpose and potential.

moving centre stage

The time has come for arts education to take centre stage and reveal its potential to deliver on this agenda. Some initial strategic steps are being taken: the PAEback group[15] has been established by a group of trustees eager to engage their peers in board-level debate about the value of education; the Clore Duffield Foundation has proposed a major piece of research on education with a view to provoking significant change across the cultural sector[16]; and Mission, Models, Money has identified 'engagement and participation' as one of seven principal issues that are key to developing organisational and financial sustainability[17]. But before the role of arts education can fully establish its central position within the arts and cultural sector and its organisations, we need to debate and explore current practice, the range of interpretations of the word 'education', and the language used to define it.

What is arts education exactly?

arts educational activity – an overview

That the word 'education' should be interpreted in many different ways in an arts and cultural context is hardly surprising. At different times over the past 60 years, it has been closely associated with a wide range of initiatives and programmes – Theatre In Education, schools matinees, life-long learning, audience development, community arts and most recently, Creative Partnerships. Furthermore, a wide spectrum of activities take place under the 'education' banner, leading to responses that range from passive involvement, such as listening or watching a show, to deeper levels of more active participation. These activities are by definition wide-ranging and ever-changing, as they continually strive to find contemporary, relevant ways of engaging with people – and since the explosion of ICT, these activities are just as likely to involve Gameboys, websites or blogs as pre-show talks and classroom-based workshops.

In some organisations, education activity maintains a strong relationship with the organisation's core

[15] Ibid 2
[16] The Clore Duffield Foundation aims to commission a major research piece about the role of learning within cultural organisations. This work is intended to take place in 2007.

programme. This might include group visits to see selected shows from the existing repertoire or more participatory initiatives inspired by the programme's content. However, in other organisations the link to the core programme is tenuous or non-existent.

Space limitations and a desire to connect with people in their own environment mean that much arts education work takes place outside of arts venues, in schools, site specific and outdoor spaces, colleges and community centres. The National Theatre's Bafta award winning website at www.stagework.co.uk is a classic example of learning activity inspired completely by the core programme but where participants need not even leave their own homes to be involved.

This can mean that some arts education projects never involve participants seeing work performed on stage inside an arts venue. There may be advantages and disadvantages in this. Some commentators feel that education should not act as a servant to the repertoire, and needs little or no link to the programme other than the art-form used: *"I don't see education's role as simply introducing people to* La Traviata *or* Carmen. *It's also about introducing opera and ballet as art-forms in their widest sense so people can use them in their own lives in whatever way they wish."*[18] Others hold the view that if there is only a tenuous relationship between arts education activity and the rest of the programme it begs the question about the overall aim for the work and the relationship of the educational activity and its participants to the artistic canon as a whole.

Who are we doing it for?

A small proportion of arts education activities seek to deepen involvement by *current users* (pre-show workshops, post-show discussions, explanatory notes, audio description and so on), but the majority is aimed at engaging the vast population of *non-users*.

Everyone would agree that for the work to be effective, resources cannot be spread too thinly, but this presents education departments with tough choices about their priorities: which catchment areas to target? what ages? which groups? what relationships to form with the rest of the creative programme? However, these prioritisations are rarely made in the context of an overall strategy for the organisation.

Furthermore, education programmes are very often compromised by the way they are traditionally funded. Short-term project funding and lack of deployment of full-cost recovery budget prevail, and organisations' central finance units generally skim off something for core costs from any fundraising income generated for education work. Negative outcomes of these behaviours include short-term projects with limited possibilities

[17] www.missionmodelsmoney.org.uk

for extension, and senior management teams who remain ignorant of the role of arts education in overall strategy and incompetent at critiquing education activities and the appropriate target groups for it. Decisions are therefore often made in an ad hoc way, informed either by the availability of funding or the skills and capabilities of staff.

A major consequence of this is that the vast majority of current arts education activity resides with the formal education sector and young people in out-of-school activities such as youth theatre, dance and music groups and summer schools. How often do we stop to ask if the focus of this work best reflects and delivers our overall objectives?

Why are we doing it?

Current arts education activity tends to operate within a minefield of motivational tensions, fuelled by restrictive funding behaviours from both the public and the private sector and the absence of organisational and sectoral strategy. The motivations that arts and cultural organisations have for providing this activity tend to fall into three clear categories[19]:

- **Arts-centred** – providing existing and potential audiences with the tools to understand, appreciate and enjoy the art, with education as a mediator between the people and the art – 'Education for Art's sake.'
- **People-centred** – opening up direct experience of the arts, with education as a means of personal development through the arts – 'Arts for Education's sake.'
- **Institution-centred** – education as a tool for achieving certain organisational aims such as audience development – 'Education for the Institution's sake'

In other words, the reasons for doing education work have usually related to a muddle of mission-led, funding-led, policy and legislative imperatives. Under this scenario it is not surprising that this work sits on the margins of an organisation.

Changing the conversation

If we were open to a new concept of arts education, re-conceived as one of learning and engagement that has its place at the core of every arts organisation's mission, we could begin to control the motivational tensions outlined above. Our research and discussions with cultural professionals reveal changes to the way they choose

[18] Darryl Jaffray, former Director of Education, Royal Opera House

to describe and define arts education, indicating that this transition is already beginning to take place.

How do the leaders of arts and cultural organisations currently charged with delivering the 'education' agenda define its purpose? The theme that comes through most strongly from them is that education in the context of performing arts is a *process* for engaging people in the art, and/or a process that utilises art to develop people: "*…the means by which we enable people to experience creative and innovative artistic processes."*[20] – "*…an interactive journey. It's the engagement in the creative process."*[21] – "*…pursuing a programme of activities that make [arts organisations'] art products more accessible to learners and increase the potential for learning opportunities that can derive from those products."*[22] – "*…getting people to understand the meaning of creativity and discover the artist within themselves."*[23] – "*…engagement with the public whether they are coming as informal or formal learners…"*[24] .

First the 'e word'

The 'e' word itself is not popular amongst this group, primarily because it is perceived as giving the wrong impression to the public, invoking their own experiences of formal education (most frequently negative ones), and implying a one-directional journey where the learner must passively absorb information or else! The term 'outreach' also appears to be falling out of favour as it also implies a one-way information flow and journey – 'we will come to you because we don't expect you to come to us'. Ken Robinson raised another problem: "*The term education…can carry with it connotations of worthiness and civic duty which feel at odds for some artists."* He concluded, "*…if the term prompts a listless commitment it should be dropped."*[25]

from education to learning

A range of alternative terms have begun to replace the word 'education': Creative Projects (Northampton Theatres, Northern Stage), Interaction (Art Angel), Creative Development (Sheffield Theatres), Creative Learning (West Yorkshire Playhouse), Projects (Contact Theatre) and Discovery (London Symphony Orchestra). Some use the word 'education' to describe a department and staff posts, but their public facing information avoids it, preferring words like 'Get Involved' or 'Explore'. At The Roundhouse you have to dig deep to find words like education and community, despite the fact that most of its work is designed for young people. Its publicity simply directs attention to the facilities, resources and art-forms available, rather than

---

[19] Ibid 4
[20] Ibid 15
[21] Maggie Semple, Governor, Sadlers Wells Trust
[22] Dick Downing, Principal Research Officer, National Foundation for Educational Research Northern Office
[23] Nii Sackey, Chief Executive, Bigga Fish
[24] Sally Bacon, Executive Director, Clore Duffield Foundation.
[25] Ken Robinson, 'All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education', 1999

drawing attention to any potential learning opportunities that these present. For them it is implicit.

Many feel that 'learning' is a better description of the type of education work they now do, and observe a shift in the purpose of education activity *"…from education as a delivery mechanism primarily reaching young people, to a relationship of learning with everyone involved in some way - staff, audiences, artists participants, business supporters and some funders."*[26]. The Royal Shakespeare Company is also a strong advocate for using the word 'learning' instead of 'education', on the grounds that the latter sets up a hierarchy between instructor and receiver, whereas learning infers a process devoid of status which could be two-directional. This shift in language implies that organisations are beginning to view education in a more holistic way than previously. The new terminology suggests that education is being seen as having the potential to open up the arts, to affect the arts, and gain wider involvement from all kinds and ages of people, *as well as* its more traditional use as a route to arts appreciation with the formal learning sector. Could this mean that, with the right leaders and trustees, arts and cultural organisations are ready to reclaim the broadest meaning of 'education' – as a process of learning and engagement – and make it work for them, and their funders, on their own terms and in line with their individual strategies?

Learning is a two way street

Conventional wisdom suggests that the relationship between art and its audiences or participants is essentially a one-way street: professional arts organisations deliver their choice of art to audiences. But if an arts organisation has learning and engagement at the heart of its mission, then the potential for the arts organisation to listen to its audiences – to find out how they want to be engaged, and what with – must also be explored. This two-way process requires an organisation and its artists to be receptive to and involved with its audiences, to dispense with the *"we will decide what has artistic merit and you will take two teaspoonfuls a day"* method of arts management and instead seek to *"…overturn the concept of centrally driven, top down delivery and replace it with systematic, grass roots value creation."*[27] This means taking the bold step of asking for opinions, listening to what people have to say and responding positively to them. It includes being receptive to introducing new forms of art, that are perhaps currently being made in the community or in alternative venues. Where this is happening at the moment, important progress is being made. For example, Leeds based Blink Media are piloting a text message review initiative where audience members are invited to text in mini-reviews of the event they've just seen. It's a simple but clever idea that opens up a creative dialogue with the public and could inform future programming decisions.

The Whitechapel's Music Curator, David Moynihan recently wrote, 'When the Whitechapel Gallery opened in

[26] Julia Rowntree, Nesta Fellow and formerly Director of the London International Festival of Theatre's Business Arts Forum

1901 it did so with the mission 'To bring great art to the impoverished people of East London'. Late last year, the renowned Grime act Ruff Squad from an impoverished estate in Bow, brought great art to the Whitechapel.'[28] The Whitechapel's regular Grime night is presenting an underground form of music-making that is usually reliant on pirate radio stations' DIY arts scene, and is attracting glowing reviews in national magazines such as i-D, The Wire and Street Soundz. David Moynihan observed, 'For the Whitechapel [these events] go much further than just helping to diversify its audience. It has provided sanctuary to a neglected but cutting edge art-form in keeping with its aim of providing a platform for artists and informing and shaping culture'.

This provides a useful illustration of how the public are increasingly aware of, interested in and capable of shaping their own culture, and it is down to the professionals to harness this. It is no longer credible to argue that grass-roots arts initiatives can be ignored because they aren't up to standard. Quality isn't owned by professionals: indeed "*…the distinction between amateur and professional is disappearing as 'amateurs' attain 'professional' standards through access to better technology and means of communication and as professionals work more and more with amateurs."*[29]

This two-way, responsive approach can enable some of our national institutions to gain relevance with far wider audiences, creating, as it does, opportunities for adapting our traditional cultural canons to boldly embrace new forms of music, dance and theatre that speak to more people.

At Sadler's Wells, a greater understanding of the diverse nature of its potential audiences has directly informed programming decisions. The venue programmes Brazilian, Asian, hip-hop and Spanish seasons (amongst many others), a dance-theatre event for babies (Oogly Boogly) and has developed an associate artist scheme so that new, emerging dance forms can be created in-house. This diversity of approach has translated into greater diversity of audiences and from a business perspective, has helped to move Sadler's Wells out of the red and into the black. Maggie Semple, Governor at Sadler's Wells, observes, *"For all the workshops and education investment at some of our most highly subsidised arts organisations, why is it that when you go there, you see so few black or young faces on and off the stage? If it was a commercial business, the directors would be asking 'why aren't these people buying our product? Perhaps we need to change the product'. Why don't arts organisations do the same? They should be asking 'who comes to our venue?' 'Who performs on our stages?' and 'who is or isn't making work in their own communities as a result of what we have inspired in them'? These are fundamental questions that all cultural organisations should be debating and not to do so is*

---

[27] John Holden, *Crisis of Legitamacy*, DEMOS, 2006
[28] www.artsprofessional.co.uk, Issue 120, 24/04/06
[29] Ibid 24

arrogant."[30]

Listening to audiences and potential audiences, and being willing to adapt in order to engage them, also has implications beyond the artistic programme. Organisations that respond to the needs of audiences as customers – for example, providing cafes, bars, bookshop and communal spaces for them to enjoy – not only reap the benefits of additional income generation, but also are helping their audiences to feel comfortable and welcomed at a cultural institution, thereby generating loyalty and preparing the ground for them to engage with its artistic work.

But notions of listening and learning go further still. If a culture of learning enables organisations to develop their outward facing relationships with people, it also has the potential to turn its attentions on their staff and volunteer teams, instilling creativity and learning from within. Garvin[31] describes a learning organisation as 'an organisation skilled at creating, acquiring and transferring knowledge and at modifying its behaviour to reflect new knowledge and insights'. In practice, this is about continuing professional development, creative problem solving, mentoring, knowledge exchange, action learning sets, promoting experimentation and embracing mistakes as opportunities to review and move on. Two thirds of executives believe that creativity is the key to gaining and sustaining a competitive advantage[32] and a number of studies have identified how learning impacts positively on business performance[33] yet cultural organisations often forget that this expertise is already part of their stock and leave creative activity firmly in the rehearsal room.

So as we move towards a new concept of education, we should acknowledge its wider role as one that can foster learning and engagement not only with participants and audiences but also internally with artists, staff, trustees, volunteers and funders.

Our proposition

Ultimately, the arts and cultural sector makes art for people. Effective art engages us and enables us to think differently about what it means to be human: we learn. Less effective art misses opportunities to engage us, because it is so focused on the product and/or the artist, it forgets the other vital component of the creative cycle – audiences and participants.

So by ring-fencing the learning function ('education') into a separate department which works only with small and discrete groups within the total audience and participant base, we keep a crucial part of the creative cycle at

[30] From an interview with Maggie Semple, Governor with Sadler's Wells
[31] David A Garvin (July August 1993) Building a Learning Organisation Harvard Business Review.
[32] Prof Amin Rajan (2003) *Harnessing Creativity to Improve the Bottom Line*, CIMA

arm's length from the majority of our work, to the detriment of all parties. The methods we use to engage people in art and the ways we choose to maximise opportunities for learning should therefore be absolutely central to our thinking as arts organisations and core to our missions. The processes by which we achieve this should be valued as highly as we value the art and the artist.

A new concept of arts education has to move on from the classic one-way stance of 'what art can do for people?' and also ask 'what can people do for the art?' Once engaged, how can people inform and enhance the art *and* the organisation as well as being the cultural receivers? As a result, we have come to define education in relation to arts organisations in a much wider sense than has traditionally been used, replacing education with the more inclusive term 'learning and engagement' as:
The process by which people are engaged in the art, and the art and the organisation are informed by people.

If learning and engagement were at the core…

The question is how can these activities be embedded into the mainstream practice of regional and national arts organisations? Suppose trustees and CEO's committed to bringing learning and engagement more core to their missions: what might this process involve?

1. **Trustees and executives would revisit their vision, mission, artistic policy and programme in its entirety and start asking themselves some difficult questions**: 'Who do we want to be engaged with our artistic programme or art-form, and in what ways?' 'Does our artistic programme need to change?' 'How can we best entice particular groups of non-users to participate in and enjoy our artistic programme?' 'What creative activities can we offer that might encourage current people to get more deeply involved and to attend more often?' 'How might these activities work alongside the artistic programme so that people can make clear links between their own involvement and what is on stage?' 'What internal learning do we need to focus on in order to achieve these aims?' Attention and resource would be shifted away from the 'supply side' of the mission and decisions would be made as to whether the organisation is happy simply to focus on young people and children, or whether its efforts to promote learning and engagement should aim to reach a much broader base of people – training programmes at all levels, perhaps, from toddlers right through to a semi-professional new generation of actors/dancers/singers.

[33] Wang & Ahmed (2003) *Organisational Learning: a critical review*, The Learning Organisation, vol 10 no 1 pp8-17

2. **The organisation's programme would be viewed as a single entity with different strands**, including a significantly enhanced and more diverse learning and engagement component, which would be integrated with the artistic work to create a perpetual circle with one feeding off the other. This would bring clarity to the evaluation of the learning and engagement work, and accountability for it would be first and foremost to the organisation, rather than its funders.
3. **The purpose for learning and engagement would be better understood and valued by everybody in the organisation and its stakeholders,** and issues of access, inclusion and diversity would be addressed more holistically because they would fit into this broader picture. Classic tensions between the learning team and the artists or programming team would be resolved, or at least debated, in the context of overall strategy, and artistic directors would have a clearer responsibility for developing learning and engagement, for example, through commissions, role models, and training routes.
4. **Organisations would invest in the expertise required to develop the most effective methods of learning and engagement** – not just standard one-off workshops or schools matinees – and would value and reward the skill it takes to run learning programmes and their distinct projects. A better understanding of how people engage with the 21st century world would be developed, and undoubtedly would lead to arts organisations adopting more online technologies, such as podcasts, blogs, chat rooms and instantly available teachers' packs, to permit wider engagement with the arts.
5. **Tensions between the 'art' budget and the 'education' budget would be relieved** because the two would be inextricably linked in delivering overall objectives. As a result, financial and funding models may transform and distinctions between project funding (for education) and core funding (for art) would be much harder to justify. Funders would be encouraged to invest holistically in an entire creative project or programme, enabling the organisation to deliver on its core objectives. Aspirational though this point is, it highlights the beginning of an important journey we need to walk if we are to become mission-led.
6. **Organisations would feel free to choose and use appropriate language and branding** to describe their learning and engagement work (if at all), rather than use labels that suit the requirements of funders.
7. **Staffing structures would be re-modelled**, with different roles created to cope with the implications of a broader delivery of learning and engagement work. This would include representation of key learning and engagement staff at strategic levels in organisations – with pay-scales to match.
8. **Audiences who wish to, would be enabled to participate actively in the arts *as much as* consume them**. Learning and participative programmes would grow and feed into the other areas of artistic work.

This is a journey of intent. We recognise that the place we wish to travel to will not be reached overnight. It is a slow and dynamic process which relies on arts organisations choosing to make a significant step change.

Despite the fact that very few of our larger, most generously funded cultural organisations currently place learning and engagement anywhere near the heart of their missions, there are pockets of evidence that reveal how effective such an approach can be, not only in terms of its impact on the art, the organisation and its audiences, but also on financial sustainability. Patrick Spottiswoode, Director, Globe Education at Shakespeare's Globe talks about theatre in Shakespearian times being rooted in *'the actors and the audience sharing the same light',* both able to be seen and heard. Founder Sam Wanamaker's vision was always that the Globe Theatre should be shared equally between the theatre and education audiences. He would be proud. Globe Education has exclusive access to the stage for six months of the year, and although the venue is not publicly funded, its education department employs 22 full-time and 50 freelance staff.

It seems clear then, that if learning and engagement is placed at the heart of an organisation's mission, this activity and ethos has the potential to make a much more positive, re-invigorating impact on the organisation than it can achieve from a position at the margins of organisational activity.

Call to arms!

The final part of this paper identifies four key issues which arts and cultural organisations will need to address if they wish to become increasingly relevant and engaging to the people they are there to serve. It offers a series of questions which should assist trustees and senior managers with the process of placing learning and engagement core to their missions:

Issue 1 - Vision and leadership

Lack of vision and understanding about the complex process of learning and engagement and its relationship to artistic objectives is a fundamental issue for board members, chief executives and artistic directors. Without their genuine buy-in and their commitment to professionalise themselves in this area, the rest of the organisation will flounder as confusion and tension develops, with departments pulling in different directions. When a holistic vision is lacking, these tensions are left to fester leaving a trail of entrenched positions and organisational 'myth making' behind them.

Provoking questions:

- Does your organisation really engage with a broad group of people? How do you listen to them? Do they influence how you are run (including your artistic decisions?)
- When did your board and senior management team last ask some serious questions about the purpose and artistic relevance of your learning and engagement programmes?
- What is the relationship between your artistic and learning programmes?

- Do your current mission and key objectives place the need for audience engagement at their core? If they do, are you doing enough to implement this, and if not what could you do?
- How many of your board members are passionate about the value of learning and engagement? Are there recruitment, skill and succession issues here? Do your board induction processes include exposure to learning and engagement, and are your board members required to continue seeing and discussing this work?
- Could internal organisational dialogue be re-structured to bring education in from the margins with a genuine seat at the table and strategic involvement at both executive and board level?

Issue 2 - Low status

The secondary status often assigned to learning and engagement work is beautifully illustrated by Sally Bacon of The Clore Duffield Foundation who saw a sign in one arts organisation that read *'Basement: This way to the toilets and education centre.'* Negative attitudes are widespread. Actors, musicians and dancers associated with the national performing arts organisations are often unwilling to take on education work because they feel it is 'beneath them' or it is too exhausting and requires very honed and specific skills. Only a minority of artists actively seek this type of work. At the organisational level, many education departments are often faced with heavy workloads, few resources, infinite objectives to satisfy, lack of career structure, poor pay (compared to their counterparts in marketing) and until recently, little representation at a senior level.

Provoking questions:

- How much profile do you give to your learning and engagement work internally and externally? How much space is this work given on your website, in your marketing materials and around the building?
- What percentage of your overall budget is invested in the learning and engagement programme and associated department?
- Do all your staff, volunteers and stakeholders have an awareness and understanding of this strand of your work? What is its status amongst the artists you employ?
- How do you recruit artists and managers to deliver your education work? What level of pay do they receive and how does it compare to other departments and activities? How do you recognise, develop and reward learning specialisms and expertise?
- Are the people responsible for developing and delivering your learning and engagement work given the opportunity to feed into strategy and budgetary decisions?

Issue 3 - Funder fashions

At the sector level, arts education is viewed more as philanthropic activity than as an essential contributor to creativity and sustainability. Its potential to resonate with charitable and social objectives has led to it being perceived as self-sustaining from short-term project funding sources, rather than being integral to the art and

therefore funded from core resources. This model not only keeps learning and engagement at arm's length from the finances and mission of the organisation, it also means it is the easiest to cull in budgetary reviews and that funders have no incentive to invest in long-term, strategic activity.

Provoking questions:

- How is your learning and engagement work funded? How much comes from core sources?
- Could you transform budgets so that your strands of main-stage and learning work are more closely meshed together so that you invest in or fundraise for an entire 'body of work' rather than separating out the education aspect?
- Could you develop more strategic, long-term partnerships with funders so that you can be more proactive (and less reactive) about overall outcomes which enable the whole artistic canon to deliver both your artistic and learning-based objectives? Could this enable them to understand the necessity to commit their support to core costs rather than marginal activities?
- How might we encourage funders to rethink the way they prioritise their funding streams so that they don't contribute to keeping education at arm's length from the rest of the artistic work?

Issue 4 - Advocacy

Eyes often glaze over at the very mention of arts education. Many people working in the arts remain unconvinced as to the value and impact of learning and engagement activity, and the case is not being made coherently or robustly. Indeed, there is a lack of hard evidence with which to make the case. Until very recently, the sector hadn't assembled a set of monitoring and assessment tools capable of demonstrating the value of learning and engagement. It has struggled to find a form of evaluation that can be understood by all stakeholders, and has found it hard to assess its activity in same way as the 'main' programme. This problem is compounded by the lack of dialogue, debate and sharing of best practice in education across the sector.

Provoking questions:

- How are the impact and outcomes of your education work measured and used to underline success in delivering mission?
- Do your definitions of quality for education work align to the benchmarks you set for the rest of your creative work?
- How are we, as a sector and as individual organizations, advocating the value of engagement and learning? How might we best collect evidence and share best practice?
- How can we encourage debate around this issue?

'Our cultural demographic is changing rapidly, and widely. Our current cultural instituitions have a duty, if they use money from the public purse, to ensure wider and greater access to what they do and how they do it.

Business currently centres most of its creative activity on its customer - without compromising quality, there is a serious need for addessing this issue holistically in the arts.' Keith Khan, Chief Executive, Rix Mix[34]

'My argument is that these new forms of mass, creative collaboration (Wikipedia, Youtube, Linux and Craigslist) announce the arrival of a society in which participation will be the key organising idea rather than consumption and work. People want to be players not just spectators, part of the action, not on the sidelines.'

Charles Leadbeater, We-think: Innovation by the Masses, not for the Masses[35]

It is time to dispense with the outmoded idea that education is a philanthropic, tokenistic activity there to appease funders or tick the 'minority' box. Redefined as learning and engagement - the process by which all people are engaged in the art, and the art and the organisation are informed by people - it has to be *the* route to greater participation in our national and regional performing arts organisations. However, there is no 'one size fits all' answer to making it happen; indeed it is vital that organisations are encouraged to develop their own bespoke responses, in ways that relate directly to their specific contexts and audiences.

If we choose to view learning and engagement as an essential contributor to creativity and sustainability then we grasp the opportunity to radically rethink how, why and for whom our arts organisations exist. We can take inspiration from the few dynamic and widely respected organisations who have proved that it is possible to reinvigorate and strengthen the way they cultivate relationships between art, artists and audiences, by placing learning and engagement at the core of what they do.

Now that you have read the paper… have your say on the accompanying blog at…

http://missionunaccomplished.blogspot.com

[34] www.missionmodelsmoney.org.uk Banner quotes
[35] www.wethinkthebook.net/home.aspx (2006)

Appendix 1: Sheffield Theatres

Sheffield Theatres has a long and acclaimed history of education work. In 2005 it reviewed the position of the education department as part of an organisational re-alignment towards five strategic aims. The review was based on the premise that theatre is a set of tools to understand and question things and that education is the mechanism for opening up this process.

The review identified that the education department had the potential to play a central role creatively and as part of the strategic aim of fostering a learning organisation. This was described as a triangle where learning sits in the middle and influences each peak: artistic, audience, and organisation.

The resulting strategy redefines education activity as Creative Development. The word education is being used in association with formal education (an education officer post exists to undertake this role) and funders. The programme delivery has broadened to involve communities, businesses, Sheffield Theatres staff (artistic and operational) as well as formal and informal education. Fundamental to the strategy is the integration of the work and the department with the rest of the organisation. This included physical proximity of staff (the department was the only one in a separate building), integration into artistic planning (becoming part of an artistic planning team), establishing learning as an internal process as well as external (programmed sessions and identifying the learning function in all job descriptions) and introducing language to set expectations more clearly in the public domain. In making such a strategic shift Sheffield Theatres recognised that this is a process of change about intent and direction that takes time.
See www.sheffieldtheatres.co.uk for detail.

Appendix 2: The Sage Gateshead

The founders of The Sage Gateshead had the joy of starting with a clean sheet with the opportunity to invent the organisation in a new way. They planned to build a concert hall but quickly realised the need for musicians in the area: where would they come from? They decided to create a concert hall with music school attached so that talent would be established locally and the concert hall and music centre would replenish one another. This early thinking developed into The Sage Gateshead as we now know it. It is a corporate aim to *'promote learning and participation at the heart of the work of The Sage Gateshead'*, with two equal 'dimensions' rather than departments: Learning and Participation, and Performance. Four Artistic Directors report to the General Director; two for Learning and Participation and two for Performance. Each pair has roughly the same budget and staff expenses. One does not follow the other: both are needed if the organisation is to survive and grow.

Katherine Zeserson, Director of Learning and Participation, is clear that the building is only one aspect of the whole organisation. The Sage Gateshead's mission statement, which is simply 'MUSIC', is the focus for the organisation, not the building. Much of the learning and participation programme takes place elsewhere so that people across the North East can engage with music in ways that are appropriate to them. Whether they then come into the building or not is not the primary concern for The Sage Gateshead's Learning and Participation team, though new data-crunching tools will identify where/when/how people are accessing both the wider and building-based programmes.

Funders often ask for information on any new artistic commissions. Katherine finds this impossible to answer adequately because everything the Learning and Participation team does is about creating new art, from the smallest workshop to the largest main stage show. When they specifically commission new work for audiences, it is marketed as such – not as 'learning & participation' generated – because it is not simply a departmental initiative. It is the organisation that makes the commission, using staff and artists/musicians from across the programmes and projects. The team is currently developing stronger communication across departments so that creative ideas can emerge more collectively and creative opportunities can be spotted quicker. It is also working on embedding learning throughout the organisation. As part of a commitment to professional development, a new programme is being piloted whereby all staff are entitled to spend at least 3% of their time focusing on skills-sharing and reflective practice through shadowing, mentoring, placement and observation across the company. The Learning and Participation team will be leading on this objective.

They describe their biggest challenge as meeting all 27 different funders' monitoring requirements. Katherine and her team find the need to continually justify the work according to different agendas is a drain on resources. It also makes the work vulnerable. She would like funders to do away with templates and all agree the core ingredients for a good learning and participation recipe then leave rest up to the individual chefs. 'Fund

us to be holistic in our approach.'

For more information see 'Hitting the Right Note', a fascinating account of Learning and Participation at the SAGE by Samuel Jones and John Holden. (www.demos.co.uk/catalogue/hittingtherightnote/) or go to www.sagegateshead.co.uk/

Now that you have read the paper… have your say on the accompanying blog at…

http://missionunaccomplished.blogspot.com

Appendix 3: London International Theatre Festival (LIFT)

Julia Rowntree led the development of the Lift Business Arts Forum from 1995 to 2005. During this period, the organisation as a whole shifted its definition of education from a delivery mechanism primarily reaching young people, to a relationship of learning with everyone involved in some way: staff, audiences, artists, participants, business supporters and some funders.

In her recent publication, 'Changing the Performance', Rowntree outlines how the learning forms, processes and relationships developed in the Forum have developed LIFT's understanding of theatre as a means of civic engagement and dialogue. She learned from Forum advisers that "The arts could be a way of unearthing and renewing our basic emotional assumptions about the nature of man, society and the natural world. In this sense LIFT could restore the theatre to its unique role of critique and recreation".

From this perspective Rowntree identifies that learning is a core part of the artistic function of theatre and our relationship with other people: "Learning is the means of being on equal terms with the public. Perceiving it as an adjunct to the core purpose will only ever enable organisations to meet surface requirements of public accountability."

This process together with many other changes has informed the new vision at LIFT. Central to this vision is the LIFT New Parliament, a performance and meeting space that is transportable, (the design process for the space itself invites the public to get involved and have their say), an icon of London innovation, created in the most international city in the world, that will travel to where it needs to go nationally and globally. It will be recognised as a genuinely democratic space that returns the word parliament to its original meaning: a place for discussion and debate, accessible to all. It will host art that is extraordinary in its own right, as well as allowing audiences, artists and participants to understand it better, engage with it fully, and enjoy it more. Lift New Parliament emerged from the desire to reinvent the way we watch and engage with theatre. Theatre will no longer be simply a form of entertainment, but a forum in which performances spark different forms of dialogue and creative engagement (and thus insight) for audiences and artists alike. Audiences will find opportunities to move from passive observer to active critics, curators and debaters to engage with challenges facing the world that are illuminated by the performances. For more information go to www.liftfest.org.uk/
